(b) if so, what would be the impact of exodus of Indian engineers on the country's economy and development; and

(c) the steps being taken to safeguard the national interest due to talent exodus?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH): (a) to (c) No record of the number of engineers leaving the country is maintained centrally, though many do go abroad for employment or higher studies. According to the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), there is a demand for technical manpower both within the country and in the global market. There has also been continuous growth in the number of Technical Education Institutions. Therefore, any apprehension about the shortage of engineers in the country may not be well-founded. In the present scenario of globalization and liberalization, the movement of technical personnel across the national boundaries is not only inevitable, but in many cases could give positive benefits to the country. It is considered neither desirable nor feasible to put in place a regulatory framework to prevent the movement abroad of qualified engineers.

Change in patent law

*279. DR. (SHRIMATI) NAJMA A. HEPTULLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to make changes in the present Indian patent regime to make it compatible with TRIPS agreement; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and how Government are planning to protect Indian interest in WTO?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) and (b) In accordance with India's obligations under the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, the Patents Act, 1970 is required to be amended, effective from January 01, 2005, in order to introduce product patent regime for inventions in the field of food, drug or medicine and substances produced by chemical processes.

The Patents Act, 1970 as amended by the Patents (Amendment) Act, 2002 contains provisions relating to public interest, public health, nutrition,

compulsory licensing, Government use and national security. The existing law effectively balances and calibrates intellectual property protection with public health, national security and public interest concerns.

Financial support to widows and divorcees from Wakf Board

*280. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAIKAR: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Supreme Court had directed that Wakf Boards should offer financial support to women from minority community in distress, especially widows and divorcees;

(b) whether the National Commission for Women has taken up the matter with Wakf Boards and the National Commission for Minorities; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MEIRA KUMAR): (a) to (c) No such directive of the Supreme Court has come to the notice of the Government. The National Commission for Women has not taken up the matter with the National Commission for Minorities. However, the National Commission for Women had convened a meeting wth Chairmen of State Wakf Boards recently to discuss, among other things, maintenance related problems of Muslim women. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Wakf Boards of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tamil Nadu.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Indo-Sri Lankan agreement

1745. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and Sri Lanka propose to workout a comprehensive economic partnership agreement;

(b) if so, details thereof; and

(c) the details of the current impediments coming in the way of free flow of trade which are proposed to be addressed?